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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

POLAND: Implications of Party Elections

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The recent Polish party elections, which selected delegates to the party congress next week, also made sweeping changes in the lower level party bureaucracy. The new local leaders will be more vigorous in defending regional interests and this will intensify the increasingly pluralistic political process. They will enjoy more legitimacy, however, and thus have a greater chance of success than their predecessors in grappling with the country's problems. [REDACTED]

The election caused major changes in the provincial party organizations. About half of the 49 provincial party leaders and a vast majority of the members of provincial executive committees were turned out of office. Only two provincial first secretaries have held office since the last congress in February 1980. [REDACTED]

These key organizations are probably now commanded by younger, better educated people who are more dynamic than their predecessors. They are committed to a new style of party work and to solving local problems, and have substantial credibility with the rank and file. At least one new first secretary belongs to Solidarity. [REDACTED]

Diffusion of Power

This infusion of new blood through democratic elections will significantly change internal party dynamics. The central party apparatus will have more difficulty asserting its authority, individual national leaders will have less secure power bases, and provincial leaders will have greater control over local affairs and greater impact on national level politicking and decisionmaking. [REDACTED]

The new leaders may share party leader Kania's moderate outlook, but few are obligated to him or to any other national level politician. Many probably have a stronger commitment to their local constituencies, which

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in the new spirit of accountability could move quickly to recall them. Those contending for power at the national level will have to seek the support of the uncommitted provincial organizations.

Problems of Parochialism

Provincial leaders are likely to be most concerned about local problems, aggressive in defending parochial interests, and willing to use initiative in tackling their problems. This will lead to an upsurge of localism that will intensify disputes and delay decisions on some national issues, particularly resource allocation.

This situation also will lead to a diversification of political and economic practices throughout the country. Economic decentralization will in turn reinforce the new sense of provincialism.

Moreover, the provincial leadership will force the center to be more dynamic and to make decisions that it might have previously tried to avoid. Successful local initiatives will challenge national policies and propel competent provincial officials into the national leadership.

The more pragmatic local leaders also may be able to establish better relations with local Church and Solidarity leaders that go beyond practices sanctioned at the national level. The party leader in Gdansk has been particularly successful in this regard; his efforts have been rewarded by greater economic efficiency and less labor strife than exists in most provinces.

The national leadership will have problems reining in these provincial forces. In trying to do so, it can exploit the inexperience of the new leaders and derive some advantage from the still strong centralist traditions.

At the same time, however, it will have to work hard to keep the support of local party officials and may have to contend with coalitions of provincial party organizations. The center will be unable to remove, peremptorily, a noncooperative provincial leader, especially if he has strong local support.